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MISSISSIPPI AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF TEXAS

JAMES E. WINSTON

While it is no doubt true that the people of the South, and especially those of the lower South, shared the indifference of the rest of the United States in general in regard to Texas before the middle of 1835, there is abundant testimony of a speedy revulsion of feeling on the part of the South in consequence of the exciting events which took place in Texas in the fall of 1835 and the spring of 1836. Interest in the affairs of Texas was by no means confined to those states which, by reason of their location and ties of blood, naturally felt keenly for their fellow countrymen who were struggling for independence against the domination of the Mexican government. A glance at the Texas revolutionary muster rolls reveals the geographically composite character of the volunteers who for one reason or another flocked to Texas. For instance, the New Orleans Greys, Captain Wm. G. Cooke, contained among forty-three members representatives of twelve different states and five foreign countries; in Captain Thos. H. Breece's company there were nine states represented, and in addition, Germans, Englishmen, and Irishmen fought side by side at the siege of Bexar.¹

Had it not been for the sympathy and material aid extended the Texan cause by Mississippi and her sister states, the story of the struggle for independence might well have had a different ending. Representative men and alert editors were not slow to detect in the Southern states a widespread interest in the events that were happening on the southwestern border. From the outbreak of the struggle against Mexico until Texas was finally incorporated within the American union, the rulers of Texas looked to the people of the South for sympathy and support. Writing from Nacogdoches in November, 1835, C. A. Parker observed: "The State of Mississippi must aid us particularly in this crisis."² At about the same time there appeared in the Mississippi papers

¹*Muster Rolls*. General Land Office of Texas.

²*Clinton Gazette*, December 12, 1835.

an appeal for aid signed by the brother of Robert J. Walker. After summarizing the events in Texas he concludes with the statement, "They need the aid of the people of the United States. They have no arms but rifles; they want artillery, muskets, ammunition and men. These they must get from the United States. A stirring appeal should be made."³ As events were to prove, the appeal was not made in vain. "So far as I can see," wrote Childress to Burnet, "the South and West are kindling into a blaze upon the subject."⁴ This was in the spring of 1836. Just three months later Alexander Jones wrote Lamar as follows: "I do believe if the invasion of Mexico and the conquest of the City of Mexico was held out as an inducement for volunteering in such an expedition, 10,000 choice troops could be raised in the western country alone for that object."⁵ Later when rumors of the invasion of Texas by the Mexicans kept finding their way into the United States, we find Henry S. Foote writing thus to Lamar: "If Texas is in danger of an invasion from Mexico, I can raise 1000 or 2000 men here in Mississippi."⁶ Hunt, writing to Henderson from Vicksburg about the middle of April, 1837, overestimated the zeal of the South in regard to Texas: "So ardent," said he, "are the Southern States to procure the annexation of Texas to plish it, will produce a dissolution of the Union."⁷ Even Webster was apprehensive of an attack upon Texas by Santa Anna, but "that Texas must succeed he had no doubt for whenever the struggle became warm Texas would be sure to get a large force from the Southwest."⁸ To the editor of the *Memphis Enquirer* the excitement in favor of Texas throughout Mississippi and Louisiana was "almost incredible." He predicted that money and volunteers would be on their way to Texas in the spirit of Southern liberality. The news of the fall of San Antonio called forth this comment: "The feelings of the brave throughout Mississippi and Louisiana have burst forth in a volume that nothing

³Woodville *Republican*, November 14, 1835.

⁴Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of Texas*, I, 85. Cf. *Ibid.*, 173; *Niles' Register*, LXII, 98.

⁵MS. *Lamar Papers*.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of Texas*, I, 208.

⁸*Ibid.*, I, 616.

but blood, liberty or death can appease.”⁹ This was newspaper rhetoric pure and simple—in fact, there were journals in Mississippi that rebuked the apathetic attitude of the people in regard to Texas. But on the whole Texas feeling ran high in Mississippi, especially at times when relations between Texas and Mexico or England or the United States assumed an acute stage.

Public Meetings of Texan Sympathizers

Two Mississippians of note, General Felix H. Huston and Henry S. Foote, were participants in the earliest organized attempt to foster public sentiment favorable to Texas. This meeting was held at New Orleans, July 14, 1835, and was presided over by Huston, the resolutions being presented by Foote. Dr. Jas. F. Maclin, of Vicksburg, was secretary of the meeting.¹⁰ The first of these, as will be seen below, played a conspicuous part in the Texas revolution; General Foote, prominent in the political history of his own State, and characterized by Claiborne as a bold and fearless man, was an active sympathizer with the people of Texas in their struggle for independence and desire for annexation. An avowed expansionist, he advocated as senator “extending American liberty” over Central America. In Mississippi, as elsewhere, the first meetings that were held for the purpose of furthering the cause of Texan independence occurred in the fall of 1835. As might be expected the citizens of Natchez, around which city clusters so much of the history of Mississippi, evinced a lively interest in the affairs of Texas. The newspaper accounts of the incipient revolution resulted in the usual “large and respectable meeting” at the courthouse in October of that year. Upon motion of General Felix Huston, John A. Quitman was called to the chair, and Wm. H. Chaille appointed secretary. Addresses were delivered by Huston and George Winchester. A lengthy preamble, with accompanying resolutions, was adopted. These recited the story of our own struggle for independence, and alluded to the struggles of Poland and Greece; deep sympathy was expressed for the Texans in the contest in which they were engaged with Santa Anna. A committee was appointed for the

⁹Issue of April 12, 1836.

¹⁰THE QUARTERLY, IV, 145.

purpose of furthering the cause of the Texans.¹¹ At the request of a Texas committee appointed at a public meeting held at the courthouse in Natchez on December 7, the manager of the Natchez theatre set apart Wednesday of the following week for the "benefit of the patriots of Texas." On this occasion, Mr. Charles H. Eaton, a "tragedian of great celebrity," volunteered his services.¹² In this same city in the following April there was held a meeting of the citizens for taking into consideration the situation in Texas. At this assembly Captain John A. Quitman presided, and General Felix Huston was secretary. An address was delivered by the Hon. Jesse Bledsoe "in an impassioned strain of eloquence." He was followed by Colonel Childress, a member of the Texas convention. Resolutions in the usual style followed, these being offered by Wm. Vannerson. One reads "That the proud dictator, Santa Anna, like the fort—Almo [Alamo] *must* fall. And the purple current of valiant gore that has moistened the plains in the cause of liberty, must be avenged." A committee was appointed to solicit subscriptions in aid of the "Texians," and for the benefit of those volunteering in the cause from the State of Mississippi.¹³

The citizens of Vicksburg responded generously to the appeal of Texas for aid, contributing the sum of \$3,500.¹⁴ Yet it was felt that Mississippi was not doing what it should in behalf of the struggling Texans. In the *Woodville Republican* for April 23, 1836, there was printed an urgent appeal for volunteers, money and horses with which to equip an expedition for Texas. One writer reproached the citizens of Wilkinson county for their indifference to the fate of Texas, especially in view of the fact that the border was menaced by a blood-thirsty foe. In the first

¹¹This committee was composed of F. Huston, George Winchester, S. A. Plummer, James Stockman, and A. I. Coffin. *Natchez Courier* in *Clinton Gazette*, October 31, 1835.

¹²*Mississippi Free Trader*, December 11, 1835.

¹³This committee was composed of John M. Ross, Wm. P. Mellen, George R. Girault, Wm. B. Duke, A. I. Coffin and A. L. Gaines. *Woodville Republican*, April 9, 1836. Cf. Claiborne, *Life of Quitman*, I, 145, who gives ten as the number of the committee: the additional names are Wm. Parker, Wm. Vannerson, R. W. Abbey, R. Stockman. After taking an active part in the Texas revolution John M. Ross is said to have finally succumbed to the scourge of the tropics.

¹⁴*Woodville Republican*, April 23, 1836.

week of October, 1835, a meeting was held at the courthouse at Woodville to form a company of volunteers for Texas; on November 10 a Texas meeting was held at the Railroad Hotel in the same town. Some two weeks later an adjourned meeting of the citizens of Wilkinson County took place at the courthouse. The call for this meeting was signed by Dr. Geo. C. McWhorter, chairman of the former meeting, and by Jas. M. Downs, secretary. The meeting was addressed by R. W. Webber, who offered a set of resolutions. In these attention was called to the inviting field offered by Texas for all kinds of enterprises; those intending to emigrate were advised to take along a good gun, a brace of pistols, and other weapons for procuring wild game. A determination to proceed to Texas on December 18 was expressed, and volunteers were invited to accompany the emigrants. It was not their intention to be deterred by revolutionary measures, "and if such struggle shall exist upon our arrival, we will do our duty."¹⁵ On April 9, 1836, a meeting of Texan sympathizers was held at Port Gibson and a liberal subscription raised.¹⁶ In the same month a similar meeting took place at Jackson. An address was made by Col. T. B. J. Hadley, resolutions of the usual kind adopted, and a committee empowered to raise subscriptions.¹⁷ In the following month a meeting was held at the courthouse of Warren County in the interest of the Texan cause.¹⁸ The interest of the people of Mississippi in the affairs of Texas was further stimulated by accounts of inducements held out to prospective emigrants in the form of land. In the *Woodville Republican* of January 23, 1836, appeared a communication signed by Austin, Archer, and Wharton promising volunteers the same pay and emoluments as were received by troops of the regular United States army, and in addition 640 acres of land.

The interest of the people of Mississippi was not confined to the material welfare of the inhabitants of Texas. At Natchez a

¹⁵*Ibid.*, October 30, November 7, December 5, 1835.

¹⁶*Port Gibson Correspondent*, April 23, 1836.

¹⁷*Grand Gulf Advertiser*, April 28, 1836. This committee was composed of J. and S. Smith, H. R. Hall, J. S. Fall, W. P. Stone and Z. P. Wardell. Colonel Hadley was commended by Thos. J. Rusk for his warm interest and exertions in the cause of Texas. *The Mississippian*, July 22, 1836.

¹⁸Rather, *Recognition of the Republic of Texas by the United States*, 213.

meeting was held and the sum of \$392 raised for the purpose of supporting a mission to Texas undertaken by the Rev. Robert Alexander, of the Methodist Church.¹⁹

Mississippi Volunteers in Texas

Houston's call to arms appeared in the Mississippi newspapers soon after the outbreak of hostilities, and it was not long before volunteers were leaving for Texas. At the little town of Clinton the citizens were enlisting for service in October.²⁰ The *Clinton Gazette* in its issue of October 31, 1835, printed a ringing editorial on Texas. The editor expressed the conviction that the men of that country would "never basely cower to the dictatorial mandates of a lawless tyrant." A company was quickly organized at Clinton to start for Texas. Among those who enlisted were Wm. B. Dameron, Geo. B. Thayer, David Shelby, Hutchins M. Pittman, J. D. Jennings, Jno. W. Allen, John Tilden, Jno. M. White, Thos. B. Cox, W. C. W. Baker, and a man by the name of Roberts. At Raymond, a little town about six miles from Jackson, the company was hospitably entertained and presented with a stand of arms; here additional recruits joined the original contingent. "Hinds county will suffer no other section to outdo her in this noble zeal," was the comment of the *Gazette*. Raymond is noteworthy as being the spot where Robert J. Walker made his *début* in Mississippi politics in September of this year. The military spirit of the citizens of Clinton was further evinced by the organization of the "Clinton Guards" in December under the command of Captain Geo. W. House.²¹ A certain pathetic interest attaches to the little company that went out from Clinton. In April of the following year the mother of one of the volunteers was seeking information of the whereabouts of her son. The following letter written to General Quitman has been preserved in the *Claiborne Correspondence*:

Clinton, Miss., April 5, 1836.

Hon. J. A. Quitman.

Dear Sir: Having learned that you have embarked in the cause of suffering Texas, I take the liberty of addressing you a

¹⁹*Mississippi Free Trader*, June 24, July 1, 1837.

²⁰*Clinton Gazette*, October 24, 1835.

²¹*Ibid.*, December 26, 1835.

line with the hope that you may be able to relieve the anxiety of a mother, whose last earthly hope has been devoted to the same cause. You may have known that my son was among the volunteers who left this place in October last. I have heard from him occasionally by individuals who have returned, but have only received one letter, and that was dated immediately after his arrival.

The late distressing intelligence from San Antonio has filled me with inexpressible apprehensions, and I beg you, my dear sir, to endeavor to aid me, if possible, in ascertaining whether he was at that place. I can never suffer more than I do at present, if my worst fears are confirmed, and any information will be preferable to the suspense which now corrodes my life.

There certainly must be somewhere a record of the names of those who fell, but situated as I am, so remote from any source of information, except the newspapers, I know not how to apply to obtain access to that record. If you will have the goodness to advise me how to proceed, or aid me in anyway, in obtaining information, you will confer a favor that will never be forgotten.

I feel a degree of enthusiasm in the cause in which you are embarked, which even my worst apprehensions are not sufficient to repress—and if I am a childless widow, it shall solace the residue of my days to reflect that I have lost my all in so glorious a cause.

Accept my fervent aspirations for your complete success, in an enterprise worthy of a Lafayette.

Very respectfully, your friend,

C. M. Thayer.

The *Port Gibson Correspondent* noted that a dozen or so had set out for Texas from that vicinity, while one writer makes mention of a company of Mississippians leaving about this time for the same destination.²² On the whole, however, there seems to have been no outburst of enthusiasm in Mississippi in behalf of the Texan cause such as was witnessed in the case of Kentucky for instance. It was not until the spring of 1836 that there took place any pronounced exodus of Mississippi volunteers; and, as will be seen, one of the principal commands arrived too late to be of any service on the field of battle. As may be surmised, Natchez served as the chief rendezvous for emigrants from

²²Issue of December 12, 1835; Rives, *United States and Mexico*, I, 364. The *True American* of New Orleans alluded to a fine cavalry company from the neighborhood of Natchez.

that portion of the State. This city was the scene of the recruiting activities of one of the most prominent figures in the Texas revolution, General Felix Huston. If we are to believe his critics, Huston played an obstreperous rather than an effective rôle in the struggle for independence; nevertheless, he rendered the cause no mean services by reason of his activities in organizing emigrants for Texas from other States as well as from his own. Huston was a typical military adventurer, ambitious and aggressive, but it would seem writers have done him scant justice in the account that one comes across in the books. He was a native of Kentucky, and when the Texas revolution broke out, was practicing law successfully at Natchez. In March, 1836, he published a letter in the *Louisville Journal* for the purpose of attracting volunteers.²³ If for no other reason the letter is interesting as throwing light upon the character of those whom Huston desires to compose his command:

Natchez, March 1, 1836.

Dear Sir: You will be surprised probably that I am going to Texas—but such is the case. I contemplate starting about the first of May, and expect to take with me about 500 emigrants. I am making preparations for arms, ammunition, etc., at an expense of \$40,000: and shall have a rendezvous and begin to send on supplies by the first of May. I wish to get some men from Kentucky. I should find no difficulty in getting as many as I want here, but there will be more difficulty in rejecting those I do not want, and who will not suit me, than in obtaining offers.

I intend to arm and uniform the men well, and provide supplies for twelve months—and I wish not to risk my fortune, my life, and my honor, on men whom I cannot rely. Such as go with me must be willing cheerfully to undergo the hardships and privations incidental to such enterprise, and preserve discipline.

I wish to get hardy, active and enterprising men, who have made up their minds, and will abide by their resolutions. I am making arrangements to obtain advantageous terms for those who emigrate to Texas with me—and shall in a few days have an agent at the convention which is now sitting. I will communicate to the public the terms on which men can join me when my agent returns. But this is now certain—they will be favorable. Those who go to Texas this year will readily find employment on good terms.

Your friend Felix Huston.

²³Quoted in the *Woodville Republican*, April 9, 1836.

The recruiting activities of Felix Huston went on apace during the month of April. His "locally notorious" efforts in this direction soon occasioned a protest on the part of the Mexican ambassador at Washington. During the first week of April Gorostiza complained that Huston was engaged in Tennessee in enlisting, arming, and clothing at his own expense a corps of 500 volunteers with which to proceed to Texas in May. The Mexican envoy moreover stated that seven vessels had been fitted out at Natchez and had embarked with hundreds of volunteers for Texas. But if such was the case, the majority of those leaving on these expeditions were not Mississippians, for an exodus upon such a scale as this would surely have excited marked comment on the part of the "public prints." A few days after Gorostiza's protest, Forsyth wrote to R. M. Gaines, the district attorney at Natchez, directing him to take measures against Huston or any others so offending. According to Claiborne, the United States marshal and district attorney were accountably absent; the former of these, Wm. M. Gwin, is said to have been at Nacogdoches at this time making large investments in Texas lands for himself and others.²⁴ A man by the name of Addison was acting as district attorney at Natchez, and he assured the secretary of state that the necessary diligence would be used to prevent any infraction of neutrality within his district.²⁵ It is not surprising to find that the attorney at Natchez, "after using great exertions to obtain a warrant, failed to do so." In a word no greater zeal was evinced in prosecuting offenders against the neutrality laws of the United States in Mississippi than anywhere else. And this was unfortunate for it gave the Mexican government a just grievance against the United States government.

A few weeks after the events narrated above, the following was written by Capt. Wm. K. English, of the *Swiss Boy* to John M. Ross, a Mississippian, who figured prominently in the events of this time.

²⁴*History of Mississippi*, 431.

²⁵*Senate Docs.*, 24 Cong., 2 Sess., VI, Nos. 25, 37, 42; *House Exec. Docs.*, 24 Cong., 1 Sess., VI, No. 256; 25 Cong., 2 Sess., III, No. 74. On the matter of neutrality, see Marshall, *The Western Boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, 1819-1841*, Ch. X.

The letter is dated Natchez, April 18, 1836, and is as follows:

I have arrived here (from Natchitoches) in compliance with my engagement to General Felix Huston, to transport as many of his friends to Nachitoches as may feel disposed to lend a hand to our suffering friends who emigrated thither.²⁶

From a communication of Thos. J. Green, brigadier-general in the Texan army, it appears that Huston expected to start from Natchez on May 7, to be followed some ten days later by General H. S. Foote.²⁷ His start was actually made on May 3, his party going by way of the Red River. He was escorted to the landing by the "Fencibles," one of the military organizations of Natchez, and accompanied by a number of volunteers, but just how many it is impossible to state.²⁸ According to his own account he did not arrive at the army until July 4. From this it is evident that when Huston arrived upon the scene, his military services were no longer needed so far as the actual independence of Texas was concerned, since that had been won by Houston and his men several months earlier. The same thing was true of Mississippi's foremost champion perhaps in the cause of Texas,—General John A. Quitman who, with his command, had the ill luck to arrive just a few days too late for the battle of San Jacinto.

The time of Huston's arrival coincided with the quarrel between the civil and military authorities of the new government. Nor did a much happier state of affairs prevail in the army. T. J. Golightly, one of those who went out with Quitman, writing to him from the camp in the neighborhood of La Bahia, states that for thirteen days the army had had nothing to eat but beef; after giving an account of the movements of the army during the latter part of May and the first week in June, he concludes with this statement: "There is much dissatisfaction in the army in relation to the acts or rather I would hope ideal prepossessions of the cabinet on the subject of the disposition of the prisoners."²⁹

Now that the Mexicans had been repelled, interest centered chiefly around the command of the army, and as always happens

²⁶*Natchez Daily Courier* in *Woodville Republican*, April 23, 1836.

²⁷*Ibid.*, May 7, 1836; *Memphis Enquirer*, May 18, 1836.

²⁸*Weekly Courier and Journal*, May 5, 1837.

²⁹*MS. Claiborne Correspondence.*

in similar circumstances, more than one felt himself born to command.

There can be no doubt that Huston would have eagerly accepted the chief command, had not circumstances at the beginning forced him into the rôle rather of umpire, while the claims of others were being passed upon. Matters reached a crisis in July when Colonel M. B. Lamar went to assume command of the army, he having been appointed major-general by the Texan government. Opposition manifesting itself among the men to Lamar's appointment, Huston was requested to act as chairman of a committee of officers to draft resolutions to be drawn, at Huston's instance, as favorable as possible to Lamar. General Lamar, however, insisted upon laying the question of his reception before the army. Then men were also addressed by Generals Green and Rusk. According to Huston's account, a few of the soldiers shouted "Lamar!" a number "Rusk!" and a large number "Huston!" Upon the question of the reception of Lamar being put to the army, 179 votes were cast in his favor, with some 1500 opposed.³⁰ On July 13, R. R. Royal had written Lamar that the meeting which drew up resolutions in regard to his taking command of the army was composed of a few officers only, the staff mostly, and he affirmed that a large majority preferred him to General Rusk.³¹ A few days after the incident just described we find Lamar writing to President Burnet of "the dreadful state of affairs in the army—everything is in threatened confusion and rebellion." He had wanted to address the soldiers, but declared that Huston, Rusk, and Green carried the popular current against him. If Huston and Green persisted in their rebellious attitude, Lamar was in favor of punishing them by court-martial, if possible; if not, they should be reported to Congress.³² Writing from Vicksburg in November to Lamar, Memucan Hunt stated that General Chambers would not serve under Felix Huston. "I have a very high regard for General Felix Huston, but I should exceedingly regret to see any discord in the army on account of the appointment of the chief command."³³ Upon the appointment of

³⁰Yoakum, *History of Texas*, II, 183-188.

³¹MS. *Lamar Papers*.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

Rusk to a seat in the cabinet—a post which he declined—the command of the army was left practically in the hands of Huston. The condition of the army seems to have improved, for early in December we find Huston writing as follows: “The army is in good health and spirits and improving in discipline.”³⁴ He expected a hard contested campaign in anticipation of an attack from General Bravo, who, it was reported, had taken the field. All during the month of December Huston was apprehensive of an attack by the Mexicans or Indians. In consequence of Huston’s report to the head of the government that the Mexicans were engaged in active and formidable preparations for the invasion of Texas, the immediate organization of the militia was ordered by Wm. G. Cooke, acting secretary of war. On December 15, 1836, Huston presided over a meeting of officers for the purpose of adopting resolutions in honor of major-general Jas. L. Holmes, of the Kentucky volunteers.³⁵ On a similar occasion, the headquarters of the army being Camp Independence, Huston occupying the chair spoke in praise of the services of Colonel J. T. Collinsworth, inspector-general. This shows the man not entirely void of magnanimity, since he could recognize the merits of a brother officer. In January the condition of the army was reported much improved. An indication of this may be seen in the meeting held by the officers of the army, including the Kentucky volunteers to protest against the libels of Messrs. Wilson and Postlethwaite, of that State.³⁶ The *Weekly Courier and Journal* of January 27, 1837, printed a letter purporting to be from an officer of high rank and standing in the Texan army, highly laudatory of Huston. The army had been out of bread for several weeks, but an excellent address from that officer had quieted all murmuring from the soldiers.

I think the course General Huston is now pursuing eminently calculated to insure the most entire and exact discipline in the army, and at the same time to secure to him the support of all who have the good of the country at heart, and are desirous that Texas should as nobly and gloriously triumph in the coming contest as she did in the last. I know of no man better entitled

³⁴*Natchez Courier* in the *Woodville Republican*, January 21, 1837.

³⁵*Telegraph and Texas Register*, January 3, 1837.

³⁶*Ibid.*, February 14, 1837.

to the confidence and support of every volunteer and every citizen of Texas, than General Felix Huston.

Early in March Huston decided to return to the United States for a short visit. The headquarters of the army were now Camp Preston. A committee of five officers drafted resolutions of a highly flattering nature to him on the occasion of his departure. In these Huston was eulogized as the true friend of liberty and Texas, and as one who was leaving the army with the universal and solid regret of both officers and men. By his skill, tact, and ability he had gradually and almost insensibly introduced and effectually restored order and discipline. To the resolutions Huston replied from Texana. He alluded to the deplorable state of the army at the beginning, and to *his* reorganization of the same, thereby securing peace and harmony; with pride he dwelt upon the fact that the officers had commended his not interfering in the politics and party rivalries of the country, and his not engaging in speculative enterprises. "He lamented the demon of speculation stalking over the land with giant strides," and threatening to stamp upon the country a lauded aristocracy. He was determined that his reputation should not suffer from the charge of marauding and plunder.³⁷ Before leaving for Mississippi, Huston severely wounded Albert Sidney Johnston in a duel fought February 5.³⁸ The latter had been appointed senior brigadier-general of the army by President Houston. In May the secretary of war was ordered to furlough all the companies save about 600 men. The army thus ceased to be a menace to the civil government. General Huston repaired to Natchez where he remained, failing to return to Texas at the first of December as he had intended.³⁹ In 1838 Huston was in Texas again, and in a letter to General Quitman he throws some interesting light upon the state of affairs at that time, and incidentally enables us to get a more complete view of his own motives.

The body of troops with which he was now associated numbered over 400, and was commanded by Rusk. Huston states

³⁷*Ibid.*, March 21, 1837; *Weekly Courier and Journal*, April 13, 14, 1837.

³⁸See *The Military Historian and Economist*, October, 1916.

³⁹*Woodville Republican*, November 25, 1837.

that he desired to assume no command himself: he had been treated coldly, but had a great many friends among the officers. The army was as fine a body of men as he ever saw, but lacked confidence in its management. "I will dispassionately do my duty. I believe as the danger thickens, I can be of great use." In his opinion Sam Houston had ruined the country, doing everything he could to prevent a turn-out of the citizens; only great prudence and firmness could save it. The Cherokees he believed were at the bottom of the mischief. He concludes by mentioning that he has bought 1280 acres of Poindexter—perhaps George Poindexter is meant—and he has furthermore been promised notes for some entries of land which will be very valuable.⁴⁰ The inference is that while Huston was willing to serve in the ranks, he felt the times demanded an aggressive policy, and it is not difficult to believe that Huston felt that he was the one to carry out such a policy.

In January of the following year Huston was in Houston. From there he writes Quitman that he is still in favor of a vigorous policy; he has no confidence in Rusk's doing anything, and deplores Lamar's temporizing policy. Though convinced that a decided majority of both houses of the Texan Congress favored his views, yet he would refrain from making a direct proposition to that body. Of greater interest is Huston's proposal to place a military colony on the Rio Grande of from five to ten thousand men, if the Texas government would authorize him to negotiate bonds for \$500,000. "If news were to arrive that the French blockade would shortly be raised, it would go like a flash." If a force could not be put on the western frontier before another year, the country would be lost.⁴¹ In April Huston was back in Natchez; from this point he writes to Quitman to learn the probability of General Hamilton's making a loan to Texas. The latter is furthermore to enquire at Liverpool as to the disposition of any large commercial house opening direct trade with Texas.⁴² In 1840 Huston rendered the new republic a service by winning the battle of Plum Creek against the Indians. Kennedy states that Huston incurred an expense of \$40,000 in connection with

⁴⁰MS. *Claiborne Correspondence*.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

sending volunteers to Texas; this is Huston's estimate of what he proposed to expend, and while it may be an exaggeration, the fact remains that large sums were undoubtedly laid out by him in equipping armed emigrants.⁴³

No writer on Texas history has a good word to say for Huston. On the contrary, he has been severely arraigned for his lack of military quarters, for indulging the soldiers in spree, and for seeking to influence them to threaten "to chastise the President, kick Congress out of doors, and give laws to Texas."⁴⁴ Most reprehensible are these charges if true; certain ones, however, are contradicted by Huston's statements, as will be shown below. Huston was, as I have said, a typical military adventurer, and was probably no better and no worse than many another who in 1836 sought in Texas an opportunity for winning fame by successful campaigns against the Mexicans and Indians. He was no doubt over-aggressive in seeking the command of the army, he deserves censure for challenging Johnston, and the Matamoras expedition, which he urged upon the government, was certainly an unwise measure. This last point deserves a little fuller consideration, since it well illustrates Huston's general policy—namely, an aggressive attitude toward Mexico. This is brought out in a letter written to General Quitman from the camp in the vicinity of Victoria in the summer of 1836. The writer sets forth his intention of starting on ahead with a force of 500 cavalry. He was convinced that Mexico would never acquiesce in the United States extending to the Rio Grande, and that a blow should be struck at her immense frontier on that river before she had time to recruit her strength and energies for another campaign. The impending invasion could be prevented by the capture of Matamoras: "if so, Mexico is open before us." Rusk and General Green agreed with him that the war must be prosecuted with energy. An invasion of that country was necessary to secure the recognition by that country of Texas independence. The writer concludes with the statement that "a short fight and long negotiation is not the way to gain a profit by victory."⁴⁵

⁴³Cf. Kennedy, *History of Texas*, II, 241.

⁴⁴Cf. Williams, *Houston*, 239; Wooten, *History of Texas*, 255.

⁴⁵MS. *Claiborne Correspondence*.

General Huston later became the law partner of S. S. Prentiss in New Orleans. When the question of Texas annexation became a burning issue in 1844, a Democratic journal recorded that Huston solemnly declared he would vote the Texas annexation ticket for the Presidency, and would moreover take the stump in Mississippi in favor of that policy.⁴⁶ Huston proved a more far-sighted political seer than might have been expected. In June, 1847, he wrote that "Gen'l Taylor will be the next President in all probability," provided he kept clear of old party questions and avoided disturbing the tariff.⁴⁷ In 1850 there appeared from the pen of Huston an interesting pamphlet entitled "The Military Strength of the Southern States, and the Effects of Slavery Therein, Addressed to the Southern Convention." The author's conclusion was that the South had no cause for alarm from its slave population or from the abolitionists.

Writing to General Quitman from Natchez in that same year, Huston expressed the conviction that the issue involved was secession or submission; he was opposed to a general Southern convention and favored State action. "Let Georgia or Mississippi take the lead and secede. And this brings the necessity of the General Government using force—and gradually other States will join." He agrees with Quitman that the North will momentarily suspend aggression, but only for the purpose of gaining strength. "Now my dear General is the time for decision and nerve, and we must not be discouraged by opposition. The destinies of nations cannot be changed without a struggle." Causes were at work which would unite the South.⁴⁸

There was another Mississippian destined to attain eminence in the political history of his State to whom the call of Texas came in a peculiarly appealing manner. The response was indicative of an ardent and a generous nature. That man was John A. Quitman. Writing to his brother from Monmouth under date of October 17, 1835, he says: "There is war in Texas. Were I without family, I would repair there immediately. Freemen who are struggling for their violated rights should not be left to strug-

⁴⁶*Sentinel and Expositor*, June 8, 1844.

⁴⁷MS. *Claiborne Correspondence*.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

gle unaided." His interest in Texas had been aroused no doubt by General Sam Houston, who had written him from Nacogdoches in February of this year. Natchez at this time contained several military organizations: among these were the "Natchez Hussars," "the Adams Light Guards," and "the Natchez Fencibles"; of the last mentioned Quitman was captain. This company had been organized by him April 24, 1824, with himself as captain, John J. Guion as first lieutenant, and Duncan S. Walker and A. Bingham, second and third lieutenants. The "Fencibles" maintained its organization for years after these events, participating in the Mexican War, and rendering valiant service in the Civil War. Writing in 1846 to the representatives of Mississippi in Congress, Quitman represented his fellow citizens as sore and dissatisfied lest they should not have a fair chance in the approaching conflict. Allusion was made by him to the "blood and treasure poured out in the cause of Texas," and to the fact that "we were foremost in the cause of annexation."⁴⁹

Having been excused from duty by his company, Quitman and Huston published notice of their intention of proceeding to Texas, together with the terms upon which volunteers would be accepted. On the morning of April 5, 1836, the people of Natchez assembled to see Quitman take leave of his company. By T. J. Green, of the Texan army, Captain Quitman was spoken of as "a gentleman of high standing and talents, who visits our bleeding country, a *soldier*."⁵⁰ Embarkation was made in the steamer *Swiss Boy*, Natchitoches being reached on the night of the 7th. From this point on the following day he wrote Huston of his intention to proceed towards Nacogdoches, making, however a slight *detour* to avoid the United States garrison at Fort Jessup. On the 9th the Sabine was crossed at Gaines' Ferry. Here Quitman was elected captain by the men. San Augustine was reached on the 10th; and Martin's on the day following. Here news was received of a threatened attack by Mexicans and Indians upon Nacogdoches, which Quitman and his men prepared to defend. Claiborne in his scholarly and interesting *Life of Quitman* prints a letter written by the latter to Huston in which a vivid account

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

is given of the terror which had seized upon men, women, and children in view of the anticipated attack. The prompt advance of his party, it is said, saved the place from being burned.

Leaving Nacogdoches on the 17th, the party crossed the Trinity at Robin's Ferry, arriving upon the field of San Jacinto just two days after that battle. Quitman was presented with a lance and a stand of arms by Lieutenant-Colonel Millard, captured from the enemy on the 21st. Some of the men remained in Texas, the others returning home. Quitman returned by the Opelousas trail, arriving at Natchez May 27th. He is said to have contributed several thousand dollars to refugees, the campaign costing him in all the sum of \$10,000.⁵¹

About seventy volunteers are said to have accompanied Quitman, though the names of very few have been preserved.⁵² On June 6 he was tendered a reception by his old command the "Natchez Fencibles," an organization which as one editor put it "reëchoed the alarms of the Bexar." The anniversaries of these companies were celebrated with much flourish and speechmaking by the citizens of Natchez: the "Fencibles" later chose April 21 as their celebration day. In spite of the fact that the two principal commands which went out from Mississippi arrived after the independence of Texas was practically achieved, yet there were volunteers from that State who fell in defense of the Texan cause. No lists of those composing the commands of Huston and of Quitman seemingly have been preserved. Among those slain at the Alamo was Christopher Parker, of Natchez; with Colonel Grant was Dr. C. P. Heartt, who lost his life, and a son of Mrs. Mary C. Marshall.⁵³ In Fannin's command were J. Falkman, Jos. Hicks, and two men by the name of Colston and Martin—the last effecting his escape.⁵⁴ B. F. Smith, after raising a volunteer company, fought as a private at San Jacinto.⁵⁵ Among the veterans of the first class who emigrated in 1836 was a group

⁵¹The above account is based on the first volume of Claiborne's *Quitman*. Contemporary newspapers also contain references to his movements.

⁵²Among these were Wm. Strickland, J. G. Golightly, M. M. Bailey, J. S. Munce, A. G. Coffin, J. Steen, and M. B. Lewis.

⁵³*Muster Rolls*, p. 6; *Grand Gulf Advertiser*, May 5, 1836.

⁵⁴*Memphis Enquirer*, June 29, 1836.

⁵⁵Thrall, *Pictorial History of Texas*, 619.

whose ages averaged nearly sixty years.⁵⁶ These Mississippi volunteers, certainly the later ones, joined the Auxiliary Corps, being with difficulty enlisted for three months. The organization was loose, and most of the volunteers seem to have returned home after the capture of Bexar.

On July 22, 1836, the governor of Mississippi issued a proclamation calling for ten companies of mounted volunteers for the purpose of aiding General Gaines. These companies raised in four divisions were to report to Major-Generals A. P. Cunningham, H. W. Dunlap, and E. L. Acee. All were to mobilize at Vicksburg by August 15th. According to the *Clinton Gazette*, 200 volunteers were recruited in Lowndes, Monroe, and Winston Counties by General Acee; these later were disbanded at Raymond. General Cunningham printed an appeal to the young men of his division to march to the defense of the frontier. General Dunlap and the Governor found it necessary it seems to order a draft in certain beats to secure troops for the western frontier.⁵⁷ The countermanding of General Gaines's requisition for troops by the government at Washington led to the disbanding of these companies.

Robert J. Walker

No account of Mississippi's attitude toward the Texas revolution would be complete without some reference at least to the invaluable services rendered by R. J. Walker in connection with the recognition of Texan independence by the United States government. The cause of recognition and of annexation had no more untiring advocate than this remarkable man, and his labors have received scant recognition from writers on Texas history.⁵⁸ Walker took his seat in the United States Senate just two months before the battle of San Jacinto, or to be exact, on February 22, 1836. His tenure of office ended March 4, 1845. In season and out of season he labored zealously for the recognition and annexation of Texas, and the fact that Texas was finally incorporated

⁵⁶Baker, *Texas Scrap Book*, passim.

⁵⁷*Woodville Republican*, August 13, 27, 1836; *Clinton Gazette*, August 27, 1836.

⁵⁸Walker's activities in connection with the recognition of Texas by the United States and with annexation have been dealt with by the writer in the *Texas Review* for April, 1917.

within the American Union was due in no small degree to this representative of Mississippi. His entry into public life in the State of his adoption was attended by interesting circumstances. By his political rivals he was regarded as an upstart, who was not overscrupulous in his methods of advancing his political fortunes. George Poindexter, who has been pilloried by Claiborne in his *History of Mississippi*, was Walker's predecessor in office. Poindexter had incurred the everlasting enmity of Jackson, and he on his part never lost an opportunity of hitting back at the usurpation and tyranny that characterized the government at Washington. Poindexter had even been charged with being privy to an attack upon Jackson's life, and by his enemies was branded as having acted the part of a coward at the battle of New Orleans.⁵⁹ While Jackson's popularity in the South may have rested upon an artificial basis, no one who had incurred his wrath at this time in Mississippi could expect any political preferment. And none knew this better than Poindexter, who in the spring of 1835 was announcing his proposed retirement from public life at the expiration of his term of office. Walker made the opening speech of his campaign at Raymond, in Hinds County, in September of this year. According to the *Clinton Gazette*—an ardent supporter of Judge Hugh L. White, and vehemently opposed to everything savoring of "caucus management"—a letter of Walker's to John H. Mallory, of Jackson, was found by the roadside after the "Raymond defeat." This was published in the *Natchez Courier* as the "Glory Letter," inasmuch as the writer had indulged in statements laudatory of himself which naturally provoked much criticism from the Whig editors. Highly offensive to the *Clinton Gazette* were the exhortations to the recipient to rally the forces of caucusism, to "do the business" of securing votes for the nominee of the Jackson convention.⁶⁰ Months before this, however, Walker's candidacy for the Senate was being promoted by himself and his supporters. In 1834 the charge was made against him that he was not a citizen of Mississippi, and was hence ineligible to succeed Poindexter. Replying to an en-

⁵⁹*Woodville Republican*, March 14, 28, 1835. The last charge was made the subject of a bitter pamphlet attack upon Poindexter.

⁶⁰Issue of October 10, 1835.

quiry of this nature, Walker was at much pains to prove himself a citizen of that State—which was perfectly true. He represented that by declining to file an affidavit to the effect that he was a citizen of Louisiana, he had forfeited stock and loans to the extent of \$15,000 in the Citizens Bank of Louisiana.⁶¹ This was set forth in a letter to John W. Gildart, a representative from Hinds County, and a supporter of Walker. Poindexter's term expiring March 3, 1835, Governor Runnels called the legislature in special session on January 19th of the ensuing year. Among the reasons given for this action was the probability of the United States Senate being convoked prior to the regular meeting of Congress, and the necessity of the State's being represented in that body.⁶² G. D. Boyd, one of the representatives from Hinds, writing in April to the editor of the *Woodville Republican*, affirmed that he had advised the Governor to call an extra session to show that Poindexter had misrepresented the State: he did not believe that as many as eight votes could have been gotten for Poindexter in the two houses; furthermore, among the names mentioned as suitable senatorial timber were those of DeGraffenreid, Pray, Hinds, and Plummer, but not that of Walker.⁶³

On the part of some, strong dissent was expressed to the choice of Walker as the successor of Poindexter, for it was held his selection would be but perpetuating the odious and anti-republican principle of government by the few; he was the caucus nominee of a Van Buren convention, and was therefore unacceptable to a large number of Democrats who preferred Judge White to "the Yankee juggler of Kinderhook."⁶⁴ The candidate for the legislature from Amite strongly doubted the wisdom of choosing either Walker or Plummer, since both had been charged with political inconsistencies and improprieties. John A. Grimball, candidate for the State Senate, from Hinds, expressed similar views.⁶⁵ One week before the selection of a successor to Poindexter by the legislature, an interesting editorial appeared in the *Clinton Gazette*, entitled "Who Shall Be Our Next Senator in Congress?" Evi-

⁶¹*Woodville Republican*, January 3, 1835.

⁶²*Ibid.*, February 7, 1835.

⁶³April 11, 1835.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, June 13, 1835.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, October 10, 24, 1835.

dently Walker was introducing new methods into Mississippi politics, but methods which have been well learned since his day: among these were an unbecoming eagerness to influence members of the legislature to vote for him; he had mounted the stump to wage a tongue war against George H. Poindexter; he had shown a lack of delicacy in reading in public a letter from the President to Colonel Campbell extolling Walker's virtues; and above all he had traversed the whole State making stump speeches. But however reprehensible such electioneering methods may have been in those days, they were not without result. There were five candidates before the legislature, Walker's principal rivals being Poindexter and Plummer. On the fifth ballot, Walker secured a majority of one, and was declared duly elected. Great was the chagrin and disappointment of the *Clinton Gazette* when Walker's election became known, for was not the newly-elected senator a "time-serving, sycophantic demagogue?" "a little, whining, county-court lawyer, notoriously incompetent, ingorant and insignificant?" Moreover, it was charged that his election was not without taint, for one representative from Copiah, and one from Scott had been instructed for Plummer, whom they had deserted.⁶⁶ Some point was given to this charge by the admission of Joshua A. Murray, of Jackson, that the night before the election he had been visited by John H. Mallory, auditor of public accounts, who suggested that he vote for Plummer first and then switch to Walker: there was to be a vacancy in the land office at Clinton in the spring, to which a salary of \$3000 was attached, and Murray might secure this. One representative, I. R. Nicholson, was hung in effigy for having voted for Walker.⁶⁷ Such was the manner in which Robert J. Walker became the representative of Mississippi in the United States Senate.

The public documents containing Walker's speeches on the Texas question are easily accessible, and it is not necessary to rehearse them here. He was one of the ablest and shrewdest advocates of southwestern expansion in Congress during the decade following the recognition of Texas independence. There is one incident of his career not so well known, and which it may be of

⁶⁶Issue of January 2, 1836.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, January 16, February 6, 1836.

interest to recall. This is the occasion of his reception by the Texan Congress, when he visited that country in the spring of 1837. By Wharton he was introduced in "encomiastic" terms to the assembled officials of the new republic. The speaker briefly reviewed his services in connection with the struggle for Texas independence. It is not surprising that on such an occasion as this some oratory of the old-fashioned type should have been indulged in:

It was as a Senator from the State of Mississippi, it was a representative of the feelings and wishes of that gallant people, so many of whose sons came here to conquer or die in the cause of Texas, that the resolution of recognition was introduced and advocated. It was the voice of Mississippi that spoke on that occasion, the voice of that people whose feelings in your behalf were overflowing as their own noble river, and warm as their own sunny clime; and whilst I acknowledge how humble were my own poor services in this transaction, how inadequate to the great emergency, how unequal to my own desires, let me say to the Congress and people of Texas, that my highest hopes and wishes will be gratified if, whilst individual names are, as they ought to be, forgotten, it is remembered that it was a Senator from the State of Mississippi who first introduced the resolutions of recognition, and that to the State, and not to any individual, is justly due the honor and glory connected with that event.

Walker did not close without appealing to those present to relax not their efforts in the cause of annexation.⁶⁸

Attitude of the Newspapers

It may be of interest to notice briefly in conclusion how the Texan situation impressed the editors of a few representative journals. The *Woodville Republican*, an anti-administration organ, naturally found much in Jackson's policy to criticize: "The President prates too much about neutrality. We should not be surprised if he were to oppose the annexation of Texas to the United States." The wail of a Whig editor is discernible in the following: "God grant that the progress of tyranny and misrule commenced by our rulers here, and meekly and tamely acquiesced in by the people, may not drive the small remnant of

⁶⁸*Telegraph and Texas Register*, June 3, 1837.

the spirit of '76, yet lingering among us, to this new land of promise. Heaven forbid that this should occur; but the aspect is now unpropitious. . . . Economy and Reform can alone save us." Governor McDuffie's course in regard to Texas was deprecated: "For, disguise it as you may, the almost entire opposition to the recognition of the independence of Texas and annexation to the United States arises from a hostility to Southern institutions." The editor had scant sympathy with the President's plea for caution in recognition on account of the disproportion of physical force of Texas and Mexico; precisely the same argument might have been set up by France when the United States applied for recognition. The idea of Texan independence evoked this outburst: "Mexico can never recover her lost domain—sooner will the Texian star irradiate over the volcano of Popocatepetl, her warriors bathe in Lake Tezcuco, and promenade in the delightful shades of the Alameda!"⁶⁹

The *Sentinel and Expositor* attacked the course of the Federal government in regard to Texas as inconsistent and vacillating. "It has paltered in a double sense both with Mexico and Texas, and every candid man must be disgusted when he reviews the course of our Federal government." This paper attributed Jackson's lack of zeal in the cause of Texas to those items in Morfit's report which dealt with the limitations upon the executive's power of appointment and removal in the constitution of the new republic. Jackson's rule was characterized as a "reign of ferocious despotism, as equalling the despotic, vindictive and malignant tyranny of all the Tarquins." Governor McDuffie's attitude toward the annexation of Texas was applauded as a "disinterested devotion to the immutable principles of justice and honor."⁷⁰ The *Columbus Democrat* was convinced that Texas had nothing to expect from the Whigs, but must look to the same Democratic party that brought in Arkansas and Michigan against the wishes of Webster, Biddle and the Bank party.⁷¹ The *Mississippi Free Trader*, ever a staunch Democratic journal, was enthusiastic for the future of Texas, and was surprised at the apathy of the peo-

⁶⁹Issues of December 24, February 27, 1836; March 11, 1837.

⁷⁰Issues of January 3, 17, 24; February 7; March 14, 1837.

⁷¹Issue of July 8, 1837.

ple of Mississippi in purchasing Texas lands, for which abundant opportunity was afforded. It repelled the assertion of the *Natchez Courier* that Van Buren was at heart utterly opposed to the Texan cause, or that the President was influenced by him. The chief magistrate had "acted honestly, feelingly, nobly"; he had preserved inviolate all treaties and according to them had observed a strict neutrality.⁷²

The *Natchez Courier* was one of the most influential journals in Mississippi and was ably edited in the interest of the Whig party. It favored the acquisition of Texas, and advised its readers to invest in Texas scrip, which was said to have met with a ready sale in Natchez. The Texas question was welcomed as showing who were for "Texas and liberty to the South, or against Texas and white freedom in the South." "The acquisition of Texas would give the South an equality in the Union by which she could maintain her rights and meet the North upon fair ground."⁷³

Mississippi thus like so many of its sister States bore its part in the movement for Texas independence; there was a measure of truth in the assertion of the *Natchez Courier* that "community and State have given Texas men and money with a liberality almost extravagant."

⁷²Issues of September 1, 1836; February 4, 7, 18, 1837.

⁷³*Daily Courier* in *Woodville Republican*, June 4, 1836; *Weekly Courier and Journal*, February 24; March 17, 24, 1837.